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THE SIGN OF THE BREATH AT THE END OF WORDS IN THE NEW-BABYLONIAN AND ACHÆMENIAN INSCRIPTIONS.

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During my investigation of the vowels at the end of the Assyrian verb, my attention was also directed to a subject, about which, so far as I know, nothing definite has been written, viz: the sign for 'Alëph which is found so often at the end of words. Delitzsch, *DG.*, p. 55, says: "Numerous examples of a breath at the end of words are found in the Achæmenian inscriptions, but the origin and purpose of this orthography is as yet obscure." The breath is not found exclusively in the Achæmenian inscriptions, although it is of very frequent occurrence, but also in the New-Babylonian texts from the time of Nebuchadnezzar II. on. It appears, however, in this period, so far as I know now, to be limited to the contract-literature and to be avoided in the more archaic royal inscriptions. I will present now a number of examples in which all the different cases of this breath, of which I know, are considered.

The breath is found:

1) After a final *a*: *i*b-ša-' *they were* (sc. *mâtâtî*), NR. 25, D. 15; *a*-ga-' *this* D. 2, 13; *i*-pu-ša-' (sc. *mâtâtî*), H. 14; *ar-ḥa-a-ta*' *monthly*, Nab. Strassm. 282, 6; *Ar-ia-ra-am-na*' Beh. 2; *Ra-ga*' Beh. 59; *Pa-ra-da*' Beh. 69, 93; *U-ri-mi-iš-da*' Beh. 7, 9, 10, etc.; *du-ka*' *kill*, Beh. 79; *ru-gum-ma*' Peiser, *KAst.* VIII. 15; *Hi-ši*'-*ar-si*' *Xerxes*, C. 3, 8; Cb. 5, 8, 14, etc.

2) After final *e*: *mu-te*'-*e-me*' (plur.) *rulers*, E. 4.

3) After final *i*: *A-ḥa-ma-ni-š-ši*' *the Achæmenian*, HR. 4, NR. 6; *A-ni-ri*' Beh. 31; *Sa-mi-e-it-ri*' Neb. Strassm. 7, 3, etc.

4) After final *u*: *Mar-gu*' Beh. 68; *Ma-ru*' Beh. 45; *U-iz-pa-ru*' Beh. 110; in verbal forms—all of which are 3d per. plur.: *ip-pu-šu*' Beh. 8; *ip-pu-uš-šu*' NR. 11; *ku-ul-lu*' Beh. 34; *it-te-ig-ru*' Beh. 16, 30; *bal-ṭu*' (Permansive) H. 3; *i-nam-di-nu*' Peiser, *KAst.* VI. 20; *id-dan-nu*' *ib.* IX. 43; the same Neb. Strassm. 26, 5 and Nab. Strassm. 368, 9, etc.; *ša-k-nu*' Nab. Strassm. 310, 4, etc.

5) After a final consonant: *A-ḥa-ma-ni-iš*' *the Achæmenian*, Beh. 1; *i-na-šar*' (3d per. plur. masc.) *KAst.* XIX. 22; *u-tir-ir*' (3d per. plur.

masc.) *ib.* IX. 42, etc.; *Pi-ir-'* *ib.* IV. 8, VI. 13, etc.; as phonetic complement, Nab. Strassm. 243, 13; 270, 8; 340, 6, etc.

From these examples one can see at once that this final breath cannot, as is usually the case, be the sign for 'Alëph, except in the proper name *Pir'*, stem פִּירָא—because the etymologies of these forms will not allow it. If we compare the forms in which the breath stands after a final vowel, we see: 1) that the breath can stand after all the vowels (*a, e, i, u*) and 2) that it stands only after long vowels, and exclusively after those in which the length of the vowel is not particularly indicated by the addition of the simple vowel, and which also, so far as the outward form is concerned could be read short as well as long. It is not necessary to bring forward any proof for the length of the final vowels in 3d plur. masc. and fem. (*û* and *â*). In the other forms, the parallel passages prove this, e. g., with *a-ga-'* usually *a-ga-a* in the Achæmenian texts; with *A-ḥa-ma-niṣ-ṣi-'*, *A-ḥa-ma-an-ni-iṣ-ṣi-i* F. 20; with *mu-te-'-e-me-'*, *mu-ta-'-i-me-e* F. 11; with *ru-gum-ma-'*, *ru-gu-um-ma-a* KAST. IV. 6, etc. In the case of the Persian proper names these comparative parallel writings cannot be brought forward, because they are very seldom found. Again, because some of these in the Persian end in a short vowel, one cannot conclude that in the Assyrian also they were pronounced with a short final vowel. All the other examples go to prove that the breath is found at the end of a word only after long vowels. Is this coincidence only a chance one? This cannot be accepted, but, on the other hand, the breath serves to mark the length of the vowel in question in forms ending in a vowel. If this is the case, only two possibilities can be thought of: either 1) this breath is a general sign of length, that is only an orthographical sign or, 2) corresponding to the otherwise usual method of lengthening vowels, which is exclusively expressed by the addition of the corresponding vowel to the syllabic sign ending in a vowel, it must then be able to express all the vowel sounds, and must have the values *a, e, i*, and *u*, because it is found after all the vowels.

The examples with consonants at the end show that the first of these two possibilities cannot be accepted. Forms like *inaṣar'* (3d plur. masc.), *utir'* (3d plur.) *inamdin'* (3d plur.) etc., must of necessity end in a vowel—in these cases *û*. Compare also *Aḥamaniṣ'* *the Achæmenian*, which according to NR. 4, F. 20 must end in *î*; *Pir'* which in all probability is to be read *Pirî*, *my offspring*; while *kaspa-'* must be read *kaspâ*. From these examples, it can be seen that the breath has lost its original consonantal value, and that it has now only the value of a vowel. It stands, however, not for *one* vowel, but it can represent *all* the vowels. On the other hand, there are numerous examples to show that the breath is still used in places where it corresponds to its original value.

Another question naturally arises, viz.: how was it possible for the breath, after it had lost its consonantal force to go over to the meaning given above. If

we look to the cognate languages, we find something similar in the Hebrew. The **ℵ** has lost its consonantal force in part and is found, after a long vowel at the end of a word, as a sign of length; cf. e. g., **הֵלְכוּ** *they went* for **הֵלְכוּ**, Josh. XIX. 24; **לָאֵל** for **לָאֵל**, etc. The breath in Assyrian is never found as a simple sign of length. The reason why **ℵ** is retained as a mere orthographical sign after it has lost its consonantal force, while in the Assyrian the spirans has taken on the value of a vowel is in my opinion to be found in the difference between the Hebrew and the Assyrian writing. The Hebrew writing is alphabetic; when the single letter lost its consonantal force, there was nothing else to do except to retain it as an orthographical sign. The Assyrian, on the other hand, is a syllabic language, i. e., every sign has not only a consonantal value but also that of a vowel which is inseparably connected with it. If the consonantal value of a sign were lost, the vocalic value connected with it must nevertheless be retained. The sign (No. 7, Dg.) had the values: 'a, 'i, 'u, a', i', u', and could be pronounced with all the original vowels—*e* is only secondary. When it lost its force, there were left the vowels with which it was originally spoken, viz.: *a, i, u* (and *e*) as we have shown above. It would have been only one step further for it to throw off this value and to become simply a sign of length. As the dates of the inscriptions, in which the above mentioned use of the breath is common, show, this decay is first seen in a very late period in the development of the language.